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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

7 November 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Contingency of an Uprising in East Germany

SUMMARY

Developments since our estimate last year\* lead us to reaffirm the view taken in that paper that an East German uprising is unlikely in the near term, although chronically possible, but that certain contingencies, such as the death or removal of Ulbricht, would increase the likelihood of major disorders. An increasing isolation of a Stalinist-oriented Ulbricht regime from anti-Stalinist Satellite regimes might in time also increase the likelihood of an outbreak, but it would not affect the ability and determination of the USSR to put it down. If an uprising should somehow occur, then we believe the Soviets would suppress it quickly and ruthlessly. This, plus the probability that the revolt would occur mainly in urban areas, well removed from the Zonal frontier, makes it unlikely that major disturbances would occur along the frontier, or that West Germans would become importantly involved. In Berlin, however, we believe that East Berliners and probably West Berliners would attempt to break down the wall in order to enable East Berliners to escape to West Berlin. Such a situation would hold dangerous possibilities for Soviet confrontations with West Berliners, or even with Western forces.

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NIE 12-4-62, "The Outlook in East Germany," dated 9 May 1962.

GROUP 1

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1. We have on a number of occasions in recent years estimated the outlook in East Germany.\* We have drawn attention to those considerations which make the stability of the East German regime a special problem for the Soviets. First, are the facts that Germany is an arena of direct strategic confrontation with the West, and that a conflagration in its eastern part could easily spread to the other Satellites. In addition, so long as East Germany remains only a part of the German nation it will be impossible for the Communist leaders to associate themselves with the force of national sentiment and thereby to solidify their domestic position. They will continue to be regarded by the populace as instruments of a foreign power.

2. Last year (NIE 12-4-62) we addressed ourselves to the short run outlook with particular reference to the likelihood of serious internal disorders. We estimated that a spontaneous general uprising was unlikely, despite the fact that popular hostility had

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\* SNIE 12-4-60, "The Situation and Prospects in East Germany," dated 3 May 1960; SNIE 12-4-61, "Stability of East Germany in the Berlin Crisis," dated 15 August 1961; SNIE 11-10-61, "Soviet Tactics in the Berlin Crisis," dated 24 August 1961; and NIE 12-4-62, "The Outlook in East Germany," dated 9 May 1962.

increased appreciably since the erection of the Berlin wall in August 1961. It was, of course, always possible for local incidents to spread and develop quickly into an outbreak on a significant scale. Previous uprisings in Communist countries had shown that such a development was essentially unpredictable. The condition most conducive to such a development, we said, "would be the popular impression that the authority of the regime was faltering or breaking down." Certain events, such as a power struggle in the USSR or the replacement of Ulbricht under circumstances implying a change in policy would increase the likelihood of spontaneous disorders. However, we said that awareness of the presence of large scale Soviet military forces, and of the Soviet determination to use them if necessary, would deter the East German people from engaging in rash action on a large scale unless they believed that decisive aid from the West was forthcoming. Should an uprising nevertheless occur, our view was that the Soviets would suppress it ruthlessly.

3. Developments in the past year do not suggest to us that the chances of an uprising have significantly increased. The population remains, as before, basically disaffected; there is great frustration and bitterness over being isolated from relatives in

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West Berlin and West Germany; and there is discontent with living standards -- especially with the failure of the regime to alleviate shortages of such basic items as food and fuel. The malaise of the youth and the intellectuals has if anything intensified because of the regime's treatment of them this spring. The peasantry remains uncooperative, though here the regime has been trying a less unreasonable approach for the sake of stimulating production. Within the party cadres, the failure of the Soviet effort to obtain a peace treaty and a change in the status of Berlin has lowered morale. Within the leadership, however, there is at present no sign of confusion, hesitancy, or division of authority which might encourage disaffected elements to attempt some kind of ill-advised action.

4. Certain ingredients of revolt are latent in East Germany, and in some circumstances widespread disorders could develop suddenly and unpredictably from local incidents. Much will continue to depend on the behavior and particularly the stability of the regime. The death or incapacitation of Ulbricht would almost certainly weaken that stability, as would certain events in the USSR, or in Soviet relations with the West. Should current trends in Czechoslovakia result in the removal of Novotny and his replacement by an

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anti-Stalinist regime, this would probably stimulate renewed demands from below on the SED leadership to "liberalize." Nevertheless, Ulbricht has proven adept in the past at shifting his ground to adjust to such pressures. Moreover, the presence of Soviet forces would enable him once again to pay lip service to change while preserving the essentials of his regime and his policies.

5. It is true that there have long been considerable differences between the internal policies of the GDR and Poland, and that similar differences with Hungary and Czechoslovakia are tending to become greater with time. These differences would be accentuated in the event of Novotny's fall, which would make it more difficult for Ulbricht to contain pressures from below for change. On the other hand, the differences between East Germany and Poland, though they are still great, are not in every respect increasing. Gomulka's attitude toward the intellectuals, for example, is not greatly at variance with that of Ulbricht. The Polish leader's tendency ever since October 1956 has been to curb them more and more, though his rejection of Stalinist methods has made outright suppression difficult, if not impossible. In any event, even if the differences between East Germany and the other Satellites should increase further, they would not greatly affect the ability of the East

German regime to enforce discipline, or diminish the capacity of Soviet forces to quell disturbances.

6. Thus we would reaffirm our previous view that an uprising of significant scale is unlikely in the near term. Moreover, as long as the Soviets see fit to maintain Soviet forces in strength in East Germany, we believe that they will remain determined and able to impose order in the country, regardless of internal political developments.

7. Looking further into the future, we think that East Germany will remain for some years to come an inherently unstable area, subject to shocks which may be generated either by failures in regime policy or international events which seem to suggest the possibility of liberation. This instability might be increased somewhat if the rest of the Bloc gradually went revisionist while East Germany clung to illiberal methods of rule. But the more fundamental causes are the harshness of life there (heightened by the contrast with West Germany) and the well-nigh universal perception of the regime as antinational. The first of these grievances might be mitigated somewhat if the succession to Ulbricht adopted more palatable internal policies; the second is likely to persist for a long time. We therefore believe that, while Germany

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is divided, a strong Soviet military presence will probably be required to keep in check the forces tending toward a spontaneous uprising.

Effects of an East German uprising on West Germany

8. Should an uprising occur, we believe that in most circumstances the West Germans, except the Berliners, would not become physically involved on a significant scale. One reason for this is that large-scale break-out attempts by East Germans along the Zonal frontier, with West Germans assisting in the effort, seem unlikely. Past patterns of revolution show that uprisings develop mainly in towns and cities rather than in the countryside. There are no towns or cities near the frontier, apart from Berlin itself, and this makes a mass movement to the boundary infeasible, though it does not mean that smaller attempts and local clashes would not occur. Moreover, we believe that the East German border guards and the Soviet forces would have little difficulty in stemming attempts by refugees to break out en masse along the Zonal boundary.

9. The situation might be quite different in Berlin itself. If the East German security forces, or the Soviet military, or both, did not assume control very speedily and effectively, East Berliners

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would almost certainly try to storm the wall and get into West Berlin, perhaps in great numbers. The people of West Berlin would probably make concerted attempts to help their brethren in any way they could, perhaps trying to storm the wall from the Western side. In the rather unlikely event that disorders in the city were prolonged, Soviet forces might become involved directly in action against West Berliners, which could in turn lead to a direct East-West confrontation.

10. We believe it extremely unlikely that West German armed forces would be used to assist an East German uprising. For one thing, the revolt would almost certainly be crushed, probably by the Soviet military, well before such forces could be brought to bear. And in any event the West German Government would hardly put its relatively small military force into direct conflict with the Soviets without full NATO support.

11. It is clear that an East German revolt, if it should occur, would present most serious problems to the West. The immediate situation in Berlin would almost certainly call for decisions respecting the conduct of the allied garrison which would be difficult and probably painful to make. More important, perhaps, the emotional involvement of the West Germans would be

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very great, since it would revive many of the hopes, fears, and frustrations aroused by the 1953 outbreaks and more recently by the erection of the Berlin Wall. If the Western allies failed to render powerful assistance to the East Germans, certainly in diplomatic and perhaps in military form, there would be popular resentment throughout West Germany, and a questioning of the value of the Western connection. It is possible that the spectacle of a widespread East German revolt being suppressed by the Soviets while the West stood helplessly by would have such a serious impact on the West Germans as to lead to widespread recrimination, with the US a principal target.

12. All the foregoing considerations apply to an uprising which developed spontaneously in East Germany. The whole situation might be altogether different if the crisis began with an incident involving allied forces, perhaps on the autobahn, which led to Soviet-Allied hostilities. Particularly if US forces were fighting, this might become the signal for a national rising undertaken in the hope that the East Germans, together with Western forces, could at last succeed in bringing down the Ulbricht regime and perhaps even taking their country out of the Bloc. Much would depend upon

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the duration, scale, and course of the fighting, but it is this contingency which might carry an uprising beyond the limits which we have estimated in the preceding paragraphs.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



*Sher*  
SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

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OPTIONAL FORM NO. 10

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

# Memorandum

TO : The Director

FROM : The AD/NE *als.*

SUBJECT: Attached Memorandum, "The Contingency of an Uprising in East Germany," dated 7 November 1963

This memorandum was prepared in response to some questions put by Walt Rostow. We request authorization to send it to him, and to USIB members for information.

CONCUR:

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DDI-5638-63

DATE: 7 November 1963

*DCI*

*1) Continued independence of Poland, Hungary etc.  
2) Reorientation of sov. subs. in East Germany and more active collection*

*Noted by DCI.*

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